

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Challenge Grants for Technology in Education**

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures.

SUMMARY: The Secretary establishes selection criteria, procedures for evaluating applications, and procedures for submission of applications under the Challenge Grants for Technology in Education Program. The program provides grants to consortia comprised of one or more local educational agencies and other appropriate entities for the purpose of improving and expanding new applications of technology to strengthen the school reform effort, improve student achievement, and provide sustained professional development of teachers, administrators, and school library media personnel. The Secretary establishes selection criteria and related procedures to make informed funding decisions on applications for technology projects having great promise for improving elementary and secondary education.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The provisions of this notice take effect April 6, 1995.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donald Fischer, Interagency Technology Task Force, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20202-5544. Telephone (202) 708-6001. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Challenge Grants for Technology in Education Program is authorized in Title III, section 3136, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6846).

Under this program the Secretary makes grants to consortia. Each consortium must include at least one local educational agency (LEA) with a high percentage or number of children living below the poverty line, and may include other LEAs, State educational agencies, institutions of higher education, businesses, academic content experts, software designers, museums, libraries, or other appropriate entities.

The Secretary announces in this notice selection criteria for the FY 1995 competition. The program statute (20 U.S.C. 6846(c)) requires the Secretary to give priority in awarding grants to

consortia that demonstrate certain factors in their applications. The Secretary carries out this mandate by incorporating the priority factors into the selection criteria. In addition, the Secretary believes that substantive selection criteria specifically framed for this program competition are necessary to enable the Secretary to evaluate how well the applicants address the purpose of the Challenge Grants for Technology in Education Program. The Secretary uses the following selection criteria instead of the selection criteria in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations, 34 CFR 75.200(b)(3) and 75.210.

Selection Criteria

The Secretary uses the following unweighted selection criteria to evaluate applications:

(a) *Significance.* The Secretary reviews each proposed project for its significance by determining the extent to which the project—

(1) Offers a creative, new vision for using technology to help all students to learn challenging standards or to promote efficiency and effectiveness in education; and contributes to the advancement of State and local systemic educational reform;

(2) Will achieve far-reaching impact through results, products, or benefits that are easily exportable to other settings and communities;

(3) Will directly benefit students by integrating acquired technologies into the curriculum to enhance teaching, training, and student achievement or by other means;

(4) Will ensure ongoing, intensive professional development for teachers and other personnel to further the use of technology in the classroom, library, or other learning center;

(5) Is designed to serve areas with a high number or percentage of disadvantaged students or other areas with the greatest need for educational technology; and

(6) Is designed to create new learning communities, and expanded markets for high-quality educational technology applications and services.

(b) *Feasibility.* The Secretary reviews each proposed project for its feasibility by determining the extent to which—

(1) The project will ensure successful, effective, and efficient uses of technologies for educational reform that will be sustainable beyond the period of the grant;

(2) The members of the consortium or other appropriate entities will contribute substantial financial and other resources to achieve the goals of the project; and

(3) The applicant is capable of carrying out the project, as evidenced by the extent to which the project will meet the problems identified; the quality of the project design, including objectives, approaches, evaluation plan, and dissemination plan; the adequacy of resources, including money, personnel, facilities, equipment, and supplies; the qualifications of key personnel who would conduct the project; and the applicant's prior experience relevant to the objectives of the project.

Selection Procedures

The Secretary intends to evaluate applications using unweighted selection criteria. The Secretary believes that the use of unweighted criteria is most appropriate because they will allow the reviewers maximum flexibility to apply their professional judgments in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in individual applications. Therefore, the Secretary will not apply the selection procedures in EDGAR, 34 CFR 75.217, which require a rank order to be established based on weighted selection criteria.

The Secretary also believes that due to the highly technical nature of the applications, it will be necessary to obtain clarifications and additional information from applicants during the selection process. In accordance with 34 CFR 75.109(b), an applicant may make changes to an application on or before the deadline date for submission of applications. In accordance with 34 CFR 75.231, the Secretary may request an applicant to submit additional information after the application has been selected for funding. For the purposes of the Challenge Grants for Technology in Education Program, the Secretary also permits an applicant to submit additional information, in response to a request from the Secretary, during the application selection process.

The Secretary will use the following selection procedures for the FY 1995 competition.

In applying the selection criteria, one or more peer review panels of experts will first analyze each application in terms of individual selection criteria. The reviewers assign to each application two separate qualitative ratings based on the extent to which the application has met the two individual selection criteria. The two ratings taken together yield a composite rating, representing each reviewer's total rating of each application. These reviewer ratings for each application are then combined to yield an overall rating for each application. The panels will also identify inconsistencies, points in need

of clarification, and other concerns, if any, pertaining to each application.

The Secretary assigns each application to one of several groups based on the application's overall level of quality. Starting with the highest quality group and moving down in unbroken order, the Secretary then identifies the groups of applications of sufficiently high quality to be considered for funding. The Secretary may request each applicant whose application was identified as being in a group of sufficiently high quality applications to submit additional information or materials to address the concerns and questions, if any, identified by the peer review panels. Such requests are strictly limited to clarifications of a conceptual or technical nature, and are not meant to fill major gaps in information that reviewers identify in applications.

A second peer review panel then reevaluates each application in a group identified as being of sufficiently high quality, taking into account any additional information or materials, to determine the extent to which each application addresses the selection criteria. The Secretary then reassigns each reevaluated application to one of several groups based on the application's overall level of quality.

In the final stage of the selection process, the Secretary selects for funding those applications of highest quality based on the results of the second review panel. The Secretary may also consider the extent to which each application demonstrates an effective response to the learning technology needs of areas with a high number or percentage of disadvantaged students or the greatest need for educational technology.

Application Deadline

In order to ensure timely receipt and processing of applications, the Secretary takes exception to 34 CFR 75.102(b) by requiring that for an application to be considered for funding it must be received on or before the deadline date announced in the application notice published in this issue of the Federal Register. The Secretary will not consider an application for funding if it is not received by the deadline date unless the applicant can show proof that the application was (1) Sent by registered or certified mail not later than five days before the deadline date; or (2) sent by commercial carrier not later than two days before the deadline date. An applicant must show proof of mailing in accordance with 34 CFR 75.102 (d) and (e). Applications delivered by hand must be received by 2:00 p.m.

(Washington, D.C. time) on the deadline date. For the purposes of this competition, the Secretary does not apply 34 CFR 102(b) which requires an application to be mailed, rather than received, by the deadline date.

Waiver of Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553), it is the practice of the Department to offer interested parties the opportunity to comment on proposed regulations that are not taken directly from statute. Ordinarily, this practice would have applied to the selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures in this notice. However, in order to make timely grant awards in fiscal year (FY) 1995, the Assistant Secretary, in accordance with section 437(d)(1) of the General Education Provisions Act, has decided to issue this notice of selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures, which will apply only to the FY 1995 grant competition.

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980

These selection criteria contain information collection requirements. As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980, the Department will submit a copy of these selection criteria to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for its review. (44 U.S.C. 3504(h))

The Department uses the information to make informed evaluations of grant applications. Annual public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to be as follows:

(1) Selection criteria—average 24 hours per response for 500 respondents.

These estimates include time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

Organizations and individuals desiring to submit comments on the information collection requirements should direct them to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, OMB, Room 3002, New Executive Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20503; Attention: Daniel J. Chenok.

Intergovernmental Review

This program is subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12373 and the regulations in 34 CFR Part 79. The objective of the executive order is to foster an intergovernmental partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and

review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for this program.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 6846. (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.303, Challenge Grants for Technology in Education)

Dated: March 3, 1995.

Sharon P. Robinson,

Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

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[CFDA No. 84.303]

Challenge Grants for Technology in Education; Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 1995

Purpose of Program: The Challenge Grants for Technology in Education Program provides grants to consortia that are working to improve and expand new applications of technology to strengthen the school reform effort, improve student achievement, and provide sustained professional development of teachers, administrators, and school library media personnel.

Eligible Applicants: Only consortia may receive grants under this program. Consortia shall include at least one local educational agency (LEA) with a high percentage or number of children living below the poverty line. They may also include other local educational agencies, State educational agencies, institutions of higher education, businesses, academic content experts, software designers, museums, libraries, and other appropriate entities.

Note: In each consortium a participating LEA shall submit the application on behalf of the consortium and serve as the fiscal agent for the grant.

Deadline for Receipt of Applications: June 2, 1995

Requested Deadline for Receipt of Letters of Intent to Apply: April 4, 1995

Deadline for Intergovernmental Review: August 1, 1995

Applications Available: March 13, 1995

Available Funds: \$27,000,000

Estimated Range of Awards: \$500,000 to \$3,000,000 per year

Estimated Average Size of Awards: \$1,000,000 per year

Estimated Number of Awards: 14-18

Project Period: 5 years

Note: The Department is not bound by any estimates in this notice.